

Career Victories

Back in the day, accomplishments at work were only accomplishments if they were acknowledged by a supervisor. That reality had at least two downsides for you. First, it limited the definition of an accomplishment to whatever made sense to your supervisor, whether or not it made any sense at all for you. And second, your accomplishments were only recognized if your supervisor bothered to do so, and sadly, not all supervisors have good human relations skills.

The net effect of this situation was to diminish your perception of your accomplishments. If you have any doubt about that, think back to the last time you wrote a resume. Remember how hard it was to recall your achievements in your most recent job, let alone those in jobs you held before that? That fuzziness indicates how little impact your accomplishments have had on your own sense of success at work.

Such a malformed view of your role at work is a threat to you and to your career. It undermines your self-image and, ultimately, your self-confidence in your own capability. And, it clouds how people see your contribution on-the-job and potential in the workplace. If you are only as accomplished as your supervisor acknowledges, they are in control of what happens to you and your career, and nothing could be more dangerous in today's much more demanding world of work.

What should you do about this situation?

Throw out supervisor-defined accomplishments and focus, instead, on personal "career victories." A career victory is different from an old fashioned accomplishment in several ways:

- **First, a career victory is defined by you.** You set a goal—I will improve my work skills or I will increase my output on-the-job—and you determine what constitutes reaching that goal—I will improve my work skills by completing this course of instruction or I will increase my output on-the-job by learning how to use that software program.
- **Second, career victories occur wherever you say they do.** They may happen on-the-job or outside it, in an academic institution, a professional association or a volunteer activity. A career victory is not limited to what happens in your employer's workplace; it describes what happens to you—the self-improvements you realize by reaching goals you set—in whatever venue you select.
- **Third, career victories occur however you say they do.** They are not dictated by what best serves your supervisor or employer. A career victory may certainly do that, but its purpose is to reinforce your self-esteem and advance your career. You decide what self-improvement will do you the most good and the conditions under which it will be realized.
- **Fourth, career victories occur whenever you say they do.** They don't depend upon your supervisor's ability to recognize them or their willingness to express that recognition in a way that will do you any good. A career victory is a success that you recognize, and it is a well deserved pat on the back that you give yourself.

Career victories are based on a very simple, but powerful premise. It analogizes achieving career success to riding a bicycle. In other words, you can coast for a short while in your career, but most of the time, you're going to have to peddle—you're going to have to engage in continuous self-improvement—to keep making steady progress. If you don't, your career will start to wobble and eventually topple over.

Although this concept may seem a bit strange at first, it's not all that hard to get used to. After all, almost all of us know how to ride a bike. And even if we haven't done so for awhile, it's one of those skills you never really lose and thus can quickly regain. Achieving career victories, therefore, is something anybody and everybody can do. They are a democratic activity. And, unlike accomplishments, where recognition

can be colored by the biases and limitations of your supervisor, they are an equal opportunity form of celebration.

You can use your career victories in several ways. To start, I suggest that you memorialize your victories in writing by creating a “career record”—a diary of sorts that describes all of your work-related successes. This document isn’t a resume, although it can certainly make writing a resume much easier. It is, instead, a simple listing of your self-improvement goals and what you did to meet them. That record, in turn, can help you see your progress in the world of work so you can celebrate your successes (whether or not they are recognized by your employer’s performance appraisal system). And, it can provide a wake-up call if you find yourself coasting along and losing momentum in your career.

Focusing on your career victories doesn’t mean that your contributions on-the-job are any less important. Indeed, they can and should be career victories to which you aspire and for which you strive. The reason you do so, however, is not to gain the recognition of your supervisor, but instead to express and experience the best you can be. That’s the true definition of success in the modern workplace.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

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